

EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT UPDATE

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Emergency services moves to mitigation

by Mary Camp
VDES Hazard Mitigation/Hurricane
Preparedness Branch Chief

What effect does a disaster have on the people in your community? What impact does a disaster have on life lines such as power systems and roads? On the delivery of goods to stores? On the ability of people to live normal lives?

The answers to these questions lie in our past experiences with disasters in Virginia. These experiences have demonstrated that mitigation plays a vital role in preventing or reducing the impact of disasters. The message of mitigation needs to permeate throughout the community — into economic, social and political strategies. Emergency management can be the catalyst for expanding the concept of disaster mitigation to the whole community.

Mitigate: To cause to become less harsh or hostile; to make less severe or painful.

The concept of mitigation is not new to local government and emergency management nor are its applications in our everyday lives. We “buckle up” to make the bumps of the road less severe. Our government agencies require buildings and vehicles to be inspected in order to reduce the risk of injury. We carry insurance to guard against personal and business financial losses. Warning systems initiate protective actions that help reduce loss of life and property.

One goal of FEMA’s National Mitigation Strategy is to increase public awareness of natural hazards to the point where the public demands safer communities. To achieve that goal, the public must recognize that all aspects of life within their communities can be made more disaster-

resilient. Emergency managers can help their communities realize what impact a disaster will have and in what areas mitigative actions are possible.

To help communities develop disaster mitigation strategies, the VDES Mitigation Program has defined three objectives:

- ✍ To develop partnerships among public and private organizations that promote community mitigation activities;
- ✍ To assist communities in assessing hazards and developing mitigation plans;
- ✍ To help secure funding so that local mitigation measures can be implemented.

The primary source of funding for local mitigation projects is the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program (HMGP) through which FEMA provides post-disaster funds for all-hazards mitigation projects. These funds are allocated to the state for each declared disaster. Since 1994, FEMA has allocated \$10.7 million for HMGP projects in Virginia. The state has allocated \$770,000 toward the non-federal match for these projects.

To date, thirteen HMGP projects have been approved and \$4.7 million in federal funds have been awarded to ten localities. Another 30 project proposals are being reviewed by FEMA and ten additional applications will be sent to FEMA in the next two months.

In June of this year, FEMA implemented the new Flood Mitigation Assistance (FMA) Program that was authorized by the 1994 re-enactment of the National Flood Insurance Program (NFIP). VDES and the Department of Conservation and Recreation are jointly administering this new pre-disaster mitigation program which is designed to reduce the costs of

the NFIP by removing residential structures from floodplains. Virginia’s allocation for the first year was \$240,000. The state expects to receive a similar amount in 1998. Although FMA is limited to flood hazards and is closely related to NFIP, its eligibility criteria and administrative procedures are very similar to HMGP.

One of the keys in expediting the implementation of mitigation projects is for localities to have comprehensive, all-hazards mitigation plans. If a community has already assessed its risks and vulnerability and defined its mitigation priorities, the FEMA grant programs can be used more efficiently for these projects. During the next year, VDES will be implementing a local planning initiative to assist localities with mitigation planning.

As part of their “Project Impact” campaign, FEMA has recently selected seven local communities to become “showcase” disaster-resistant communities. Through this new program, the selected communities — none of which yet include Virginia — will receive funds and technical assistance to implement comprehensive mitigation strategies. FEMA plans to expand the program to include other communities in 1998.

The shift in focus at the national level is moving the familiar concept of emergency management — which is traditionally understood as encompassing preparedness, response, recovery and hazard mitigation — into the larger concept of comprehensive planning that affects the economic and social life of a community as well. This comprehensive approach can reduce the effects of a disaster, both in loss of lives and destruction of property, for people in communities across our state.

For more information, call Mary Camp at 804/897-6525.

Teaching disaster awareness and preparedness

The first step in educating people about disasters is to make them aware it can happen to them, says an expert in the field of public education, Dr. LuAn Johnson. Once you've convinced people of this point, they'll be more inclined to take the "action step" and prepare.

To be effective, the preparedness message should:

- ❑ Point out the severity of consequences without taking a "doom and gloom" approach;
- ❑ Illustrate the likelihood of a disaster occurring;
- ❑ Give people confidence in their

public officials — that the actions they recommend will work;

- ❑ Help people feel they can do what's recommended.

Johnson describes the public perceptions that could interfere with the preparedness message and offers strategies to counteract them:

- ❑ "It won't happen to me." Bring out the maps and predictions and share past experiences.
- ❑ "Disaster preparedness takes too much time and it's an overwhelming task." Suggest that the task be broken into small blocks of time and that individual tasks be spread out over a period of time.

❑ "It costs too much." Point out that preparing is cheaper than repairing. Recommend paying for individual tasks over a period of time. Offer inexpensive and resourceful ways to reduce risk.

❑ "Preparedness doesn't really work." Once again, counter that attitude with your own or other people's experiences. Provide examples.

❑ "I'm not confident that I can do a task like this." If you've done it yourself, show them and set an example.

The bottom line, according to Johnson, involves perception. People must *feel* their actions will be effective and this helps provide the motivation.

FEMA course targets preparedness for schools

If school officials in your jurisdiction want the who, what, when, where, why and how of disaster planning, FEMA's Emergency Management Institute has the answers. EMI holds a number of classes to help emergency managers and educators work together to improve school disaster preparedness.

In addition to courses that target earthquake disaster planning for schools, a new four and a half-day class focusing on all-hazards planning, was piloted for the first time last summer.

Titled "*Multi-programs for Schools*," it touches on everything from potential

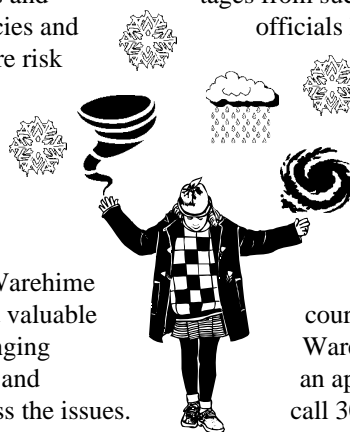
violence in schools — such as problems with gangs, weapons, drugs and other issues — to emergencies and disasters. Topics covered are risk education techniques, drills, immediate response exercises, post-disaster recovery, mitigation opportunities and crisis counseling.

Course manager Dawn Warehime pointed out one of the most valuable aspects of the course is bringing emergency services people and educators together to discuss the issues.

While the two groups gain many advantages from such a partnership, school officials learn of the abundant

resources available to them. "The educators are not always aware of the resources emergency services agencies have to offer," said Warehime.

For more information on course content, call Dawn Warehime at 301/447-1309. For an application for course E362, call 301/447-1000, ext. 1035.



VDES designs Reservist Program as resource

After months of recruitment and training, the VDES Reservist Program is reaching a state of readiness for the next disaster. The intent behind the program is to develop a cadre of trained people who can be called upon during a disaster to support agency response and recovery efforts.

"Very few states that I know of have developed a reservist program," said VDES Emergency Services Operations Supervisor, Sam

Hoffman. "Several years ago, we saw a need to supplement current staff during disasters, both at the EOC and at the DFOs, to support 24-hour-a-day operations. We've been able to identify about 35 positions where we can use professionals with different skills and abilities."

Reservists will be activated primarily during presidentially declared disasters to support existing VDES staff. Currently, about 60 percent are retirees and come from a

variety of career fields, including federal, state and local government, engineering, law enforcement, fire services and building and construction.

The mandatory training program — designed in conjunction with the agency's program managers — requires some independent study and attendance of applicable EMI and VDES courses.

Reservists assigned to EOC duties test their readiness this March in a one-day disaster response exercise.

"Recruitment is still ongoing for this program," said Hoffman. "We've received a total of 130 applicants and accepted 75 of those. We've been very pleased by the response. We have what we think is a great group of professionals that bring a wealth of knowledge and experience to our response and recovery operations."

For information about this program, call Sam Hoffman at 804/674-2405.

HAZ MAT

Course is “street-level”

With the jungle of legal and technical issues surrounding a hazmat event, nothing is more challenging than managing one. To help you lead your team safely through the underbrush, the VDES Tech Haz Division has developed the “Hazardous Materials Incident Management” course that covers management issues and concerns.

“A hazmat response differs from a normal fire response,” said Tech Haz Training Officer Ron Hargrave. “There were no courses out there to prepare the field commander, who would normally manage a hazmat incident, for this type of response. This is not a class based on theory — it’s ‘at the street-level’ — designed so that you can walk out and immediately put to use what you’ve learned in the class.”

The course covers OSHA requirements and other federal regulations that apply to a hazmat incident, state laws, the state EOP, who to call for help and other topics. The issues that are discussed include the environmental impact of an incident, who’s paying and who’s responsible for what.

If you’ve ever wondered at what point the incident is no

longer an emergency, the course offers guidelines and checklists to help you make this decision.

Small groups are put together so that members represent a range of experience and job skills, much like the mix of people that might be found in the “real world.” The groups are brought through a series of practical exercises that conclude in a complex, multi-agency response scenario.

Hargrave stressed the class is relevant to incident commanders as well as county attorneys and city managers who want to be aware of the legal ramifications of hazmat incidents in their jurisdictions.

“The class deals with the concepts, issues and strategies related to a hazmat incident and helps you understand the legal aspects of a hazmat response,” said VDES Hazmat Officer Steve DeLisi, who attended the course this past November. “It encourages you to think strategically, not tactically. This decision making process deals with what needs to be done, who will do it and when to do it.”

For more information about the course, call Ron Hargrave at 804/897-6573.

Virginian receives CEM

In September, Tom Hassler from the Thomas Jefferson National Accelerator in Newport News, was approved by the NCCEM Certification Commission to receive the Certified Emergency Manager credential. The CEM designation is the highest honor of professional achievement from NCCEM. Requirements for this credential include experience, references, education, training and contributions to the profession.

Virginia programs featured in FEMA compendium

Two top-notch programs from Virginia are included in Volume II of FEMA’s *Compendium of Exemplary Practices in Emergency Management*. Chesterfield’s “Police-Fire Incident Management Course” is designed to teach advanced ICS concepts to command-level officers in law enforcement and fire services. The course demonstrates effective ways the two disciplines can work together under the ICS umbrella.

Under Arlington County’s Emergency Management System program, emergency services can respond rapidly and effectively to natural and manmade disasters. An Emergency Management Team, an Emergency Planning Team and six task group teams spread planning and response capabilities between them. The task groups, in particular, deal with such functional areas as shelters, communications, resources, routing and traffic control, employee support and recovery.

To find out more about these two programs, order your copy of the compendium by writing FEMA at PT-SL-PL, Rm. 614, FEMA, 500 C St., S.W., Washington, DC, 20472.

While you’re ordering, submit your own innovative program for Volume III and share Virginia’s successes with the rest of the country. The forms are in the back of the publication and entries are reviewed by a broad spectrum of the emergency management community.

Homepage hones in on new look

As you catch that 15-foot wave, you suddenly lose control, launching you and your surfboard into a watery wall of water. The thought occurs to you it might have been healthier if you had listened to Beach Boys songs on your office radio instead.



We have an even better alternative. Surf the internet waves to the redesigned VDES homepage, complete with a new, easy to remember site address and an updated, incredibly user-friendly interface.

The site includes links to the Emergency Management Directory containing e-mails of VDES staff and local emergency managers, VDOT’s home page where you can get information on everything from the agency’s snow removal policies to almost real-time traffic reports, NWS and numerous others. And the 1997-98 Winter Preparedness Campaign makes its premiere on the new site. Everything is designed so that you do minimum scrolling to get where you want to go.

Go to <http://www.vdes.state.va.us> and surf the waves of information coming your way.

Training Calendar

PDS Leadership and Influence

December 9-11
Fairfax County

Decision Making and Problem Solving

Originally scheduled for December 11, has been rescheduled for January 7, 1998.
Rockingham County

EOC Management and Operations

December 15-17
James City County

Elected Official's Briefing

The Elected Official's Briefings, originally scheduled for December 18 and February 9, have been postponed until a later date in 1998

Effective Communications

January 13-15, 1998
Stafford County

Introduction to Emergency Management

January 14-16
VDES in Richmond

Basic Public Information Course

January 21-23
VDES in Richmond

Status Assessment Facilitators Workshop

January 27-28
VDES in Richmond

Effective Communication

February 4-6
Region III, Location TBD

Developing Volunteer Resources

February 18-19
Culpeper

EOC Operations and Management

February 23-25
Region I, Location TBD
For information, call the VDES Training Office at 804/897-6559

Technological Hazards Division

Hazardous Materials Incident Management

The February class has been canceled and will be rescheduled for a later time.

Hazardous Materials Technician

March 9-20
The location for this class has been changed from Ashland to Martinsville

For information, call the VDES Tech Haz Division at 804/897-6573

Search and Rescue

SAR Council

January 24
Richmond

GSAR Institute

January 16-18 (Part I)
February 20-22 (Part II)
Roanoke
For information, call Winnie Pennington at 804/674-2422

Conferences

SFCAV Midwinter Conference

February 27-March 1, 1998
Virginia Beach
For information, call Janet Areson at 804/649-8471

In conjunction with the SFCAV conference, the following course is offered:

"Public Safety Response to Terrorism — Management Considerations"

February 26-27
For information, call Ron Hargrave at 804/897-6573

Virginia Emergency Management Conference

February 11-13, 1998
Virginia Beach
For information, call Chris Eudailey at 540/582-7095

National Hurricane Conference

April 6-10
Norfolk
For information, call Jim Talbot at 757/441-5600

1998 Annual Conference on Technology in Emergency Management

April 21-24
Virginia Beach
For information, call Mark Pennington at 804/897-6532

VDES adds to video library

The American Red Cross and the Weather Channel's new video titled, "*Project Safeside: Keeping Ahead of the Storm*," is well worth the visual journey.

This tightly-edited information product targets families and offers all the basics of disaster preparedness. Starting with the results of a recent ARC survey that demonstrates Americans aren't ready to face disasters, the video springboards into the preparedness message.

Weather Channel meteorologists describe how to plan, how to assemble a disaster supplies kit and where to go for further information. They stress updating, renewing or applying for the proper insurance coverage.

Call Bertha Jackson at 804/897-6510 to reserve your copy.

Conference sweeps into Norfolk

The National Hurricane Conference sweeps into Norfolk April 6-10 of next year.

The cost for Virginia residents is \$150, but you must register through Norfolk Deputy Emergency Services

Coordinator, Jim Talbot, to qualify for this fee.

If you'd like to attend the Awards Banquet scheduled for April 9, the cost is an additional \$10.

For more information, call Jim Talbot at 757/441-5600.



10501 Trade Court
Richmond, VA 23236-3713

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State Coordinator ... Addison E. Slayton
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